

Good morning, and thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

What's it like to have normal hearing? I myself can't answer that question.

My name is Ellie Warren and I am currently a sophomore at Rochester Institute of Technology. You last heard from me 2 years ago when I was still a senior in high school, and then before that while I was still a junior. A few things have changed, but my hearing loss has not. I was first diagnosed with moderate bilateral hearing loss when I was 3 ½ years old, and I have worn hearing aids ever since. My hearing loss is a part of who I am, and I will wear hearing aids for the rest of my life.

I'm sure you'll hear about the numbers-- the costs of having hearing aids, audiology visits, speech therapy, and more, but it's easy to distance ourselves. They're just numbers, right?

Let me give you some of my numbers: I have 3 siblings, and 2 of them have hearing loss too. My sister, Tessa, is in 10th grade and loves DND, while my brother, Toby, is in 7th grade and enjoys taekwondo and wrestling. Meanwhile I'm a sophomore in college, who is currently a resident advisor in the dorms. My family has 3 kids who wear hearing aids and the costs of audiology services can rise to over \$13,000 annually. I recognize that we are extremely privileged to be able to afford this, but many families aren't.

Beyond that, I've given my previous addresses using spoken English, my main mode of communication, because I was able to receive these *medical devices* early enough into my diagnosis. If my access to hearing aids was delayed, the cost of speech therapy would have been overwhelming-- more so than the cost of hearing aids themselves. Whether you realize it or not, we live in a hearing world, where many deaf people, including myself, feel isolated. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the wearing of masks, I've been unable to rely on lip reading, and found myself relying more and more on my hearing aids. I will say it

one more time: we live in a hearing world. Hearing is not a “cosmetic feature”.

Looking into the future, I’m attending Rochester Institute of Technology with a double major in Biomedical Sciences and Applied Spanish Language with a plan to graduate in 2025. After my undergraduate degree at RIT, I will continue my education by pursuing an MD through SUNY Upstate Medical University, where I have already secured admission. My hearing aids have helped me access my education, make valuable connections with my teachers, and communicate with the right people to open doors for me.

My hearing loss is a part of who I am. I will always need to be able to access sound. I *needed* hearing aids when I was 3 ½ to avoid speech delays. I *needed* them when I was 6 and played soccer. I *needed* them when I was 13 and took engineering classes. I *needed* them during high school for Mock Trial and AP Calculus. I *need* them as the president of the beekeeping club and ballroom competitor during my undergrad. I will *need* them as a medical resident. I will *need* them when I’m a doctor. Access to sound is access to my community, my school, my employers, and hopefully, one day, my patients.

I appreciate that Ohio House Bill 198 is going to address this critical need for Ohio’s deaf and hard-of-hearing kids. I implore you to pass it— to give Ohio children the same access to sound and invaluable opportunities in the way that I have.